

THE STAVA VARNAS OF SWATI TIRUNAL

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The *varna*, as is well known, is an important type of composition in Karnatic music. It figures in music concerts and, even more prominently, in dance recitals.

It presents the form of a *raga* through musical phrases, familiar as well as rare, distributed within a frame work having two parts called *purvanga* and *uttaranga*. The *purvanga* consists of a *pallavi*, *anupallavi* and *muktayi-svara*. The *uttaranga* consists of a *charanapallavi* and three to five *ethukkada svara* sets with progressively increasing number of *avartas*. There is *sahitya* for the *pallavi*, *anupallavi* and *charanapallavi*, but of a very limited nature and serves simply to supply a syllable here and there, the interval between two syllables being filled by the repetition or extension of the vowel part of the first of the two. Sometimes we find *sahitya* for the other parts of the *varna* also. This is called '*svarasahitya*'. This will be so set as to have one syllable for every note in the *varnamettu*. It thus forms a contrast to the *sahitya* of the *pallavi* etc.

In content, the *sahitya* is generally found to be erotic, the hero being either a god or a prince or patron. When it is God, a spiritual significance is imported into this eroticism. It may be in the form of an address by the *nayika* (heroine) to the *nayaka* (hero) imploring his mercy or love or complaining about his neglect of her. It may also be in the form of the *sakhi* describing to the *nayaka* the condition of her mistress and conveying to him her message. It may, again, be in the form of the *nayika* confiding to her *sakhi* her mental anguish and agony and sending her to the *nayaka*.

Varnas are generally classed as *tanavarnas* and *chowkavarnas*. The first will be in the medium tempo and the second in the slow. Those with *svarasahitya* are usually set in slow tempo in order to afford facility for the danseuse to present the sense in appropriate gestures. The *sahitya* being erotic, largely similar to that in the class of compositions called *padas*, the *chowkavarnas* came to be called *padavarnas*. In contrast, the *varnas* without

svarasahitya came to be called *tanavarnas*. This name gained ground when the *varnas*, primarily meant for dance, came to be sung in music concerts, particularly at the commencement, without the *svarasahitya*. The *Tanachowka* classification based on tempo came to be identified with the one based on the presence or absence of *svarasahitya*.

Swati Tirunal is a very outstanding figure among the composers of this difficult form of music which demands a good knowledge of the science of dance, a thorough grasp of the theory of *rasa* and aesthetic presentation and a complete mastery of rhetorics to clothe the theme in felicitous expressions to provide literary charm. He has composed some twenty five *varanas* comprising both the types and in nineteen different *ragas* which have among them the somewhat rare *Ghanta* and *Purnachandrika*. In addition to the *atatala* and *aditala* which are commonly employed for *varanas*, he has used *rupakatala* also¹. Some of these are musically marvellous and so pregnant with meaning that they provide ample scope for great elaboration and impressive delineation of the love-in-separation (*vipralambha sringara*) which is the sentiment dominant in them². The *nayaka* is explicitly Lord Padmanabha, so that the love is clearly in the spiritual plane.

An examination of the *varnas* of the Maharaja shows that while the majority of them are *Sringaravarnas* with *prema bhakti* or erotic mysticism as their theme, some pertain to the conventional form of *bhakti* constituting prayers and praises. These latter are called *stavavarnas*, meaning 'varnas in praise of god'.

The following are the compositions of this type:

Sl. No.	Beginning	Raga	Tala	Deity addressed
1.	<i>Chapalasampad</i>	<i>Bhairavi</i>	<i>Ata</i>	<i>Padmanabha</i>
2.	<i>Jagadisa srijane</i>	<i>Suddhasaveri</i>	<i>Ata</i>	<i>Padmanabha</i>
3.	<i>Palaya mam deva</i>	<i>Purnachandrika</i>	<i>Adi</i>	<i>Siva</i>
4.	<i>Ramavakhila</i>	<i>Begada</i>	<i>Ata</i>	<i>Rama</i>
5.	<i>Sarasijanabha</i>	<i>Mayamalavagaula</i>	<i>Adi</i>	<i>Padmanabha</i>
6.	<i>Saridisavasa</i>	<i>Todi</i>	<i>Ata</i>	<i>Krishna</i>
7.	<i>Sadaramiha</i>	<i>Madhyamavati</i>	<i>Adi</i>	<i>Padmanabha</i>
8.	<i>Sadhu vibhatam</i>	<i>Bhupalam</i>	<i>Adi</i>	<i>Padmanabha</i>
9.	<i>Saveriha</i>	<i>Saveri</i>	<i>Adi</i>	<i>Parvati</i>

The texts for all these, except No. 5, are available in *Swati Tirunal Maharaja Kritikal* edited by K. Chidambara Vadhyar³ and *Sangitakritis of Swati Sri Rama Varma Maharaja* edited by K. Sambasiva Sastri⁴. Indication of the notation for the *muktayi* and *ethukkada* portions are given in these; for No. 7. the same is given for *pallavi* and *anupallavi* also. Nos 3,

8 and 9 are given in full notation is S. Ranganatha Iyer's *Balamritam*.⁵ No. 3 is available with full notation in *Maharaja Sri Swati Tirunal Kritikal* Part II edited by L. Muthayya Bhagavata⁶. No. 5 is contained in the last mentioned work alone. Unfortunately, all these works have long been out of print.

Although Padmanabha is the favourite deity of Swati Tirunal, it can be seen that, as in the case of his *kirtanas*, in these *stavavarnas* also he has sung of other deities as well. Out of the nine, five are on Padmanabha, one each on the incarnations of Rama and Krishna and one each on Siva and Parvati.

In '*Jagadisa srijine*' in *Suddhasaveri* addressed to Padmanabha we find Krishna and Narasimha also extolled. These two are also major deities in the Padmanabhaswami temple in Trivandrum. They have full *pujas* on all the specified times of the day and they are taken out in all processions along with Padmanabha in separate *vahanas*, the only difference being that while Padmanabha's *vahanas* are in gold, these are in silver but exactly similar in size.⁷ In '*Sadaramiha*' in *Bhairavi*, which are in praise of Padmanabha in general terms like protecting the devotees, granting all their desires, killing the enemies of gods, removing all sins etc, we find reference to Krishna like his raising the mountain and helping Arjuna. In '*Sarasi-janabha*' in Mayamalavagaula, we find Padmanabha addressed as one who took the Rama incarnation. In '*Ramavakhila*' in Begada the beauty of Rama and all his main exploits like winning Sita, killing the demons like Viradha and Ravana, giving Ahalya her original form, and subduing the pride of the crow are mentioned. Similarly in '*Saridisavasu*' in Todi the beauty of Krishna and his exploits like helping the Pandavas against the treacherous Kauravas, killing Sisupala, holding the mountain over the cowherds etc, are given but the association with the Gopis, somehow, does not find mention.

'*Palaya mam deva*' in Purnachandrika is in praise of Siva of Sreekantheswaram in Trivandrum as can be seen from the term of address '*Srikanthesa*' in it. Siva is spoken of here as the abode of kindness, the husband of Parvati, the destroyer of Kamadeva and Saviour of Markandeya. His drinking the poison is stated and killing the Tripuras is indicated. '*Saveriha tanuja*' in Saveri is a prayer for the grace of the daughter of the mountain. The beauty of the goddess, her predilection for residence in the minds of the Yogins, her killing the demon Mahisha and her being the sister of Padmanabha are all stated in appropriate expressions.

'*Sadhu vibhatam*' in Bhujalam stands as a type in itself. It wakes up Padmanabha at dawn and this song is used for this purpose even now. It announces to the Lord the break of the day addressing Him in a series of significant epithets among which are *paramapurusha* 'the supreme

Person,' *lokesa* 'lord of the worlds', *sokanasana* 'destroyer of distress', *papavanadahana* 'the fire burning the woods of sins', *parijatasama* 'equalling the Parijata tree in generosity' and *kripalaya* 'abode of all compassion'. The prayer is also made to bring in all goodness.

Two other Stavavarnas pass in the name of Swati Tirunal, but it is doubtful whether they are really his. Both are Tanavarnas without svara-sahitya. One is the Aditala varna '*Sarasijanabha*' in Nata raga. Recently it has gained some currency. It is said to be a composition of Palgat Parameswara Bhagavata who was the chief musician in Swati Tirunal's court and who has to his credit a few other songs also, including, probably, the sahitya for the Pancharaga-svarajati of the Maharaja⁸. Another is the Aditala varna '*Pavanasuguna*' in Anandabhairavi occurring in Muthayya Bhagavata's *Maharaja Sri Swati Tirunal Kritikal* Part II. Its sahitya is technically defective in that the Pallavi ends in the middle of a compound word which runs on into the Anupallavi.

Pallavi

पावन सुगुण निरुपम ! भानुशशिनयन !
देवदेव ! पुरारि—

Anupallavi

कमलजदिदिपदधिपतिवन्दित !

It is difficult to believe that Swati Tirunal, with his perfect mastery of music and Sanskrit, would have composed such a sahitya. It may also be noted that this Sahitya is the same as for the second charana of the Maharaja's well known composition '*Smarajanaka*' in Bihag raga. The dhatu is identical with that of the varna '*Chalamelajesi*' of the Tanjore Quartette in the same raga Anandabhairavi and Aditala.⁹ Neither the musicians attached to the Maharaja's Palace, nor the Nagasvara Vidvans in the Padmanabhaswami temple, where only the Maharaja's compositions are used, are familiar with these two pieces.

Taking the cue, probably, from Muthuswami Dikshitar, the author has introduced the name of the raga in some of these songs. Thus '*Saveriha tanuja*' commences with the name Saveri.¹⁰ In '*Sadhu vibhatam*' the name Bhupala occurs at the close in the expression '*bhupalakanikara*! In '*Chapala-sampad*' also the raga name Bhairavi occurs at its close in '*bhairavim me papatavim*'. The charanapallavi '*purnachandrikanibhanga*' contains the name of the raga Purnachandrika of the varna '*Palaya mam deva*'.

Among the ragas chosen, Bhupala, the raga of dawn for rousing from slumber and Begada for the heroism of Rama are particularly appropriate.

The Varnas in Bhupalam, Madhyamavati and Suddhasaveri are rare specimens of the type for those ragas. The Talas are what are most common in this type of composition, namely Ata and Adi.

Among these, 'Savarijanabha' in Mayamalavagaula is a Tana varna, being without svarasahitya, and the rest are Chowkavarnas, having svarasahitya. All of them have proper balance between the Purvanga and Uttara-ranga and fair proportion among the units within each. Each is clothed in well blended and smoothly flowing musical phrases that bring out the characteristics of the raga in full.

One noteworthy feature in all the eight of these Chowkavarnas is the presence of the appendage called 'Anubandha' after the last Ethukkada svara. See for, instance,

पूर्णचन्द्रिकानिभाङ्ग ! भूतवृन्दसंसेवित !
पुण्डरीकनाभादृत ! तूर्णमीश ! देहिमोदम् ।

at the end of the Purnachandrika varna, or

धाराधरचिकुरा तापशमनचतुरा ।
वारिजनाभानुजा चारुमोक्तिकहारा ।

at the end of the Saveri varna. The Anubandha leads on to the Pallavi with which the piece starts. So, besides being an appendage in itself, it serves to link the Uttara-ranga with the Purvanga and thus establish an integral connection between the two parts of the Varnas. Otherwise, the two would appear to be two distinct sections independent of each other although set in the same raga and tala.

The introduction of the Anubandha section in Varanas is not an innovation of Swati Tirunal. But it shows that he has followed an earlier tradition not observed by many composers, contemporary or later, and not respected by the musicians and dancers¹¹ or even by the editors of these songs. It is doubtful whether it is generally known that the famous Bhairavi Varna 'Viriboni' of Adiyappayya does contain an Anubandha. If the version of this song in Subbarama Dikshitar's *Sangitasampradaya-pradarsini* is any indication, the Anubandha leads on to the latter part of the Anupallavi and the Muktai svara is also sung before going to the Pallavi. A somewhat similar indication we get in the Madhyamavati varna 'Sadaramiha! From the skeletal notation available for it, it is discernible that the Anubandha here leads on to the Muktai and, through it, to the Pallavi.

The Varnas well exemplify Swati Tirunal's unrivalled mastery of Svarakshara embellishment, the artistic device by which a note (Svara) in

1. सीः३ वाः३ पाः३ गा गा अ प । प ग प ग री गा ॥
सी०० अ०० वि०० मा न०० मा०० गु००
पाः३३३३३ गा । गा अ म पा अ प । अ प अ ग पा वा ॥
न०००००० म०० ये०० मा०० अ००००००
2. सीः३ अ पा गा री गा । पाः३३३ । अ अ प ग ग प अ ॥
सी०० ग र श य न पा००० ट ल रु नि ष डु पु ट
3. पाः३३ पाः३३ पाः३ । गा गा अ प । प ग प ग ग रि गा ॥
पा०० पु०० व००० न द०० ट००० न००
4. अ प ग ग रि ग अ अ प ग रि रि स । पा अ सां स प अ ।
ता प मि स्ति त ग द आ र ण ति न ण गा रि जा त म म
अ प प ग रि स रि ग ॥
रि षु प व न मु जे ग
5. पा अ प ग ग रि ग पा ग रि स रि स अ । पा अ स रि ग रि ग ।
पु त रु नि ज न रु गा ल य रु नि र ज पु अ र स म थि क
पा अ प ग ग रि ग ॥
अ व न रु ण ट त

पा अ सं अ प ग ग पा अ सं रि ग रि स । पा अ ग रि स अ प ।
पा प म ग अ अ प पा रा अ टु थि रि स पा ल न नि ज क्षु नि
पा अ प ग ग रि ग ॥
पु रि त म द न ग

the music part becomes identical with the corresponding syllable (*Akshara*) in the text part. Many instances can be cited from a single Varna. We may cite a few from the one in Bhupala.

We may now look into the other specialities in the *dhatu* of these Varnas.

In most of them, The Ethukkada svara sections end in the same *nyasa svara*, often in the same phrase. Thus in the Madhyamavati varna this note is M in all, in the Begada varna the phrase GM, in the Bhupala piece RG; in the Purnachandroha song this is RGM, in the one in Bhairavi PDN, in the composition in Todi SRG. In the last mentioned varna, it may be noted that the Charana-pallavi and the first and second Ethukkada sections end in the same musical phrase DDNDNSRG and they have the same sahitya—*vitānu kusalamayi*.

In the Saveri varna, SNDPMGRS in which the adventitious notes Kaisiki Nishada and Sadharana Gandhara figure, occurs twice in the Muk-tayi and once at the end of the third Ethukkada. There is a pleasing janta prayoga GG RR SS NN DD PP MM GG RR with its steady descent

at the close of the last Ethukkada in the Begada varna. There is a fine crescendo soon after the commencement of the Mukthayi in the Bhairavi song, R S N D P D N S R. The Mukthayi here ends in the Avarohana of the raga and the last Ethukkada in the Arohana.

It is a characteristic of Swati Tirunal that in almost all his varnas there is at least one section which is constituted of equilinear phrases commencing with the same note and that this note invariably has svarakshara synchronism. This is displayed in all these Stavavaranas also. Extract 5 given above from the Bhupala varna is a typical instance. All the eight phrases here are similar. They start in P and bear svarakshara coincidence. We may cite the example of the third Ethukkada of the Saveri varna also:

M,; P D N D P M G R S R

M,; P D P S N D P M G R

M,; G R G S R S N D S R

M,; M P D, P M G R M P

In the Bhairavi varna, again, we get in the last section a series of uniform phrases with the *graha* S and *nyasa* in R, R, M, P, N in order showing a regular progression.

S, RS ND NS

S, GR GM GR

S, RG MG GM

S, RG MP DP

S, RG MP DN

The Purnachandrika Varna deserves special attention. There is some confusion regarding its form and svaraprayogas. The entire song is in Tisragati, as rightly discerned by Muthayya Bhagavata, but Ranganatha Iyer, presumably being unaware of this fact, meets with the difficulty that several sections end in the middle of the avarta. He suggests a repetition of the respective sections to overcome this. But both these editors have overlooked some of the prayogas seen in the editions of Chidambara Vadhya and Sambasiva Sastri, like the somewhat unusual S N P D N S which occurs twice, as also S N P D R S which repeatedly occurs. The latter is retained in Ranganatha Iyer's version but is much changed in Muthayya Bhagavata's, on what basis we are unable to know. What should engage our attention is not simply whether such prayogas would fit in with the present form of the raga, but whether they could represent an earlier form of the raga or whether they stand in isolation.

In conclusion, we may say that the Stavavarna is an innovation of Swati Tirunal introduced to indicate that a particular form of song need not necessarily be confined to a particular content in theme, and that even in dance the portrayal in a Varna need not necessarily be the sentiment of love, but can as well be a graceful presentation of the glory of God.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. For a general account of these Varnas and their musical specialities see my *Swati Tirunal and his Music* (Trivandrum, 1975), Chapter 11—'Dance Compositions'.
2. Detailed exposition of the literary, artistic and musical values of three of the difficult Varnas 'Sa Vama rusha' in Khamas, 'Dani Samajendra' in Todi and 'Satura Kamini' in Kalyani, together with full notation, are given in my articles on these in the Souvenirs of the Sri Swati Tirunal Sangita Sabha, Trivandrum, for the years 1978, 1979 and 1980 respectively.
3. Government Press, Trivandrum, 1916. Malayalam Script.
4. Trivandrum Sanskrit Series, No. 113, Trivandrum, 1932. Devanagari Script.
5. Trivandrum, 1917. Malayalam Script.
6. Government Press, Trivandrum, 1943. Malayalam Script.
7. For details, see my *Religion, Art and Culture*, Trivandrum, 1977—Section 5 'The Temple of Padmanabha'.
8. See *Swati Tirunal and his Music*, p. 137.
9. See my 'The Authenticity of some of the Swati Tirunal Kritis', *Journal of the Music Academy*, Madras, Vol. 37, 1966, pp. 128-29.
10. The expression is *Sa veh iha tanuja* meaning 'the daughter of the mountain'. The meaning 'mountain' for *vi*, however, is known only to the lexicographers.
11. The full notation, meaning and significance of the Anubandha of the Khamas varna *Sa Vama Rusha* are available in the publication mentioned in Note 2 above, but those who dance the Varna on its basis are seen to ignore this section.

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